

Message Text

SECRET

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12

ACTION SS-30

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P R 040625Z MAY 74

FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

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COMUSSAG PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

S E C R E T PHNOM PENH 6315

EXDIS

DEPARTMENT PASS INFO SEC DEFENSE, CJCS

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MILI, PINS, CB

SUBJECT: MEETING WITH MARSHAL LON NOL - MAY 3

REF: PHNOM PENH 6270

1. SINCE MY PRESENTATION CONSUMED 50 OF THE 60 MINUTES WE SPENT WITH THE MARSHAL, LON NOL HAD LITTLE TIME TO ENGAGE US IN A DIALOGUE. I ALSO HAD THE IMPRESSION THAT THIS PACKAGE WHICH I DISCUSSED SOMEWHAT OVERWHELMED HIM. AT ONE POINT IN THE CONVERSATION HE STARTED GOING OFF ON A TANGENT--THE KHMER ATTACHMENT TO BUDDHISM--AND I HAD TO STEER THE CONVERSATION BACK TO THE SPECIFIC POINTS I HAD RAISED WITH HIM. AFTER REMINDING HIM THAT I WAS LEAVING THE TALKING POINTS PAPER WITH HIM FOR THE PURPOSE OF STIMULATING ACTION, LON NOL SAID THAT HE WOULD RAISE THE INDIVIDUAL POINTS IN THE PAPER WITH THE LEADING FANK GENERALS TO OBTAIN COMPLIANCE.

2. OUR CONVERSATION FOCUSSED ON THE DETERIORATING SITUATION AT LOVEK AND ON THIS PARTICULAR SUBJECT HE SEEMED GENUINELY INTERESTED AND CONCERNED. IN ORDER

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TO GOAD HIM INTO ACTION, I POINTED OUT TO THE MARSHAL

THE THE OPERATION IN THE OUDONG-KOMPONG LUONG-LOVEK AREAS WAS LINKED TO THE PRESTIGE OF CERTAIN KHMERS WHO HAD ORDERED THE HOLDING OF THIS POSITION "AT ANY COST". (THIS WAS A DIRECT REFERENCE TO THE MARSHAL'S PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT IN ORDERING THE RECAPTURE OF OUDONG AND THE SUBSEQUENT SETBACKS.) THE POINT WAS NOT LOST ON THE MARSHAL WHO TURNED TO GENERAL PALMER TO INQUIRE WHAT COULD BE DONE TO STABILIZE THE SITUATION THERE. GENERAL PALMER STRESSED THE NEED FOR EFFECTIVE AND MASSIVE AIR SUPPORT FOR THE DEFENDERS AND NOTED THAT THIS SUPPORT HAD BEEN FORTHCOMING DURING MOST OF THE DAY. HE ALSO NOTED THAT BRIGADIER GENERAL MEY SICHAN HAD BEEN SENT UP BY THE KHMER GENERAL STAFF TO ASSUME COMMAND OVER THE ENTIRE ENCLAVE. SINCE HIS ARRIVAL THERE SOME 24 HOURS AGO, PALMER NOTED A DISTINCT IMPROVEMENT IN THE WORKING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FANK AND KAF IN THE LOVEK AREA. GENERAL PALMER ALSO EMPHASIZED THE NEED TO EXPAND THE PERIMETER OF THE ENCLAVE AND IF THIS IS NOT POSSIBLE AT LEAST TO PREVENT CONTRACTION BECAUSE OTHERWISE IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO CONTINUE AIRDROPS AND TO REINFORCE BY HELICOPTERS. A REDUCED PERIMETER WOULD ALSO INCREASE THE RISK OF ENEMY ARTILLERY OR MORTAR ROUNDS STRIKING AN AMMUNITION STORAGE AREA AND POSSIBLY LEAD TO PANIC AS WAS THE CASE AT OUDONG.

3. THE MARSHAL NOTED OUR RECOMMENDATION TO MAKE THE COMMUNIST WEAPONS STORED AT LOVEK INOPERATIVE AND ASKED WHETHER THIS HAD BEEN DONE. GENERAL PALMER SAID THAT HE HAD SUGGESTED THAT ARMS HAVE THE BOLTS REMOVED AND BARRELS SAWED OFF BUT HE DID NOT THINK THIS HAD AS YET BEEN CARRIED OUT.

4. THE MARSHAL APPEARED TO BE IN A HURRY TO END THE MEETING, PERHAPS BECAUSE HE WANTED TO CONVOKE SOME FANK GENERALS TO IMPRESS ON THEM NEED TAKE URGENT ACTIONS IN LOVEK.

5. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT THE POINTS WE MADE WITH THE MARSHAL WERE PRESENTED
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FORCEFULLY AND CLEARLY, WE CAME AWAY FROM THIS MEETING WITH THE IMPRESSION THAT THE PROBLEMS THAT ARE FACING THE KHMER MILITARY APPEAR TO BE TOO BIG FOR THE MARSHAL TO COPE WITH EFFECTIVELY. HE WILL PICK OUT SOME OF THE POINTS I MADE WITH HIM AND MAYBE PASS ON THE HEAT TO OTHERS BELOW HIM. I FEAR HOWEVER THAT IF LOVEK SHOULD FALL HE WILL BE LOOKING FOR A SCAPEGOAT TO BLAME FOR THE SETBACK. HE WILL NOT FACE

THE REALITY THAT PART OF THE PROBLEM MY WELL BE HIS
INOPPORTUNE MEDDLING IN MILITARY MATTERS AND THAT HE
IS NOT GIVING THE NATION THE KIND OF LEADERSHIP WHICH
INSPIRES MEN TO SACRIFICE. FOR EXAMPLE, THE DAY
LOVEK NEEDED THE ATTENTION OF THE GENERAL STAFF, HE
INSTRUCTED THE ASSISTANT FOR OPERATIONS MAJOR GENERAL
MAO SUM KHEM TO GO TO PURSAT AND IT TOOK GENERAL
PALMER'S PERSONAL INTERVENTION TO KEEP MAO SUM KHEM
IN PHNOM PENH TO FOCUS ON THE LOVEK COMBAT. AS I
WAS LEAVING THE MARSHAL I GENTLY REMINDED HIM THAT
HE SHOULD SCHEDULE HIS TRAVELS IN THE PROVINCES ON
DAYS WHICH DO NOT COINCIDE WITH THE MEKONG CONVOYS BECAUSE
HIS TRAVELS DIVERT ESSENTIAL GUNSHIPS WHICH ARE
NEEDED TO PROTECT THE RIVER CONVOYS COMING UP FROM
VUNG TAU. INDEPENDENT OF WHATEVER THE MARSHAL WILL
DO WITH THE GENERAL STAFF ON LOVEK, WE ARE WORKING
CLOSELY WITH THE GENERAL STAFF AND FANK TO GET
THEM TO TAKE THE NECESSARY MEASURES TO STABILIZE THE
SITUATION THERE. IF THIS OCCURS IT WOULD BE IN GOOD
PART THANKS TO KAF'S ALL OUT EFFORT TO INFLICT HEAVY
CASUALTIES ON THE ENEMY AND GAIN TIME WHICH FANK
DESPERATELY NEEDS.
DEAN

NOTE BY OC/T: NOT PASSED ABOVE ADDRESSEES.

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